ROUTING AND RECORD SHEET

SUBJECT: (Optional)

Paper on Soviet Strategic Thought for the President

FROM:	EXTENSION	NO
Fritz W. Ermarth NIO for USSR		NIC #05197-85 DATE 18 Oct 85

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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC #05197-85
18 October 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

VIA: Chairman, National Intelligence Council
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council HGM

FROM: Fritz W. Ermarth
National Intelligence Officer for USSR

SUBJECT: Paper on Soviet Strategic Thought for the President

1. Several days ago I gave Jack Matlock the attached draft paper which he requested from me as part of his continuing series of informal backgrounders for the President. Like earlier submissions from SOVA and others, he planned to edit and abridge as necessary for the President's reading. Yesterday one of Jack's assistants told me that the paper looked OK and probably would go forward largely unchanged.

2. The paper is a variation on a lengthier and more analytic piece I did for Kissinger in support of his PFIAB charge to examine what we had learned about Soviet military doctrine and how that might help our arms and arms control planning. Kissinger, as you know, is scheduled to talk with the President soon about this, perhaps to give him a letter on the subject (a PFIAB staff draft of which you have seen), and to recommend that the President receive a seminar-style briefing from some or all of the figures who briefed Kissinger at the onset of his inquiry (Ermarth, Odom, Gershwin, Negus, and Marshall). Expecting that the President might be interested in this, Kissinger wanted you to discuss orchestrating the desired presentations with Secretary Weinberger, and may have mentioned this when you saw him a week ago.

3. This may be overkill on an important, but not all-important subject. It would be helpful, however, for the President to appreciate -- as a bottom line -- that determined pursuit of our military programs, from conventional technology to SDI, has a chance of knocking the props out from

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under the way the Soviets think about and configure their offensive power. The very prospect of this happening may help persuade them to modify their military ambitions and perhaps other aspects of their behavior we find threatening. Of course, there is a big difference between hypothesizing about such things and actually doing them.

Fritz W. Ermarth

Attachment

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SOVIET STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC THINKING

Underlying all the destructive weapons and forces are ideas about strategy. From the mid-1960s well into the 1970s, many influential Americans believed -- despite persuasive evidence to the contrary from Soviet military writings and

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-- that Soviet strategic thinking had to be very much like our own. In our familiar American tendency to attribute our own views and values to other peoples and their leaders, we tended to believe that, because we and the Soviets both faced the awesome problem of nuclear weapons, and we were both basically sensible people, we had to think about the management of this problem in roughly the same way. Maybe the Soviets weren't quite as sophisticated as we with all our think tanks and academic journals, but they would more or less follow our lead in strategic thinking.

Today, while this mistaken "mirror imaging" of our views on the Soviets persists in some circles, we know a lot better. The manner and size of the Soviet strategic and other force buildups of the last twenty years showed that the Soviets thought differently than we about strategy and military, including nuclear, power. Study of the Soviet buildup, of Soviet military exercises and command structures, of their military writings

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has taught us a great deal about Soviet strategy and military thinking. It underscores some important differences from our own.

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This shouldn't have been surprising to us. After all the Soviets are coming from a different place in geography, in history, and in political culture. Although now a global military superpower, at least in nuclear terms, Soviet Russia remains a continental superpower and, like Tsarist Russia, places a high store on dominating its continental periphery. The influence of history and political culture is often misunderstood as follows: Having been frequently invaded by Europeans and Asiatics over the centuries, Russians are seen as pathologically insecure; hence the they feel the need for massive military power. There is some truth in this, but the essence is different. First of all, growing from a small principality in Muscovy, Russia has spent much more time invading and conquering than being invaded and conquered. The Russian state was built by the autocratic princes of Moscow, not by the merchants of the more westward-looking cities, such as Novgorod. For this reason, Kremlin rulers have from Medieval times to the present seen their security, indeed the legitimacy of their rule, to rest upon as much control over people, their own and those around them, as they could get. These attitudes toward political power have also shaped Russian and Soviet thinking about strategy and military power.

Americans tend to think of military power as an unpleasant but necessary means of preserving live-and-let-live conditions in a sometimes dangerous world. The Soviets think of military power as a means of preserving and expanding their authority. This makes their strategy both very defensive and very offensive at the same time.

The structure, or architecture, of their strategy and their overall military forces displays this quality. The basic aims of Soviet military power in war, and also in peace, are to assure the survival of the political system at home and to enhance the projection of its power in the surrounding world. Hence the Soviets have been engaged in strategic defense, air, civil, and ABM defense, from the beginning of the nuclear era. We had strategic defenses in the 1950s, but gave them up in the 1960s, in favor of the deterrent "balance of terror" concept based on nuclear offensive forces. The second basic mission of Soviet military strength is to project power into the surrounding regions of Eurasia, especially Europe, but also in East Asia and southward toward the Middle East and Persian Gulf. Hence the enormous land combat forces, with their accompanying air and nuclear power, far more than they would need to retain control of East Europe or to deter attacks. By contrast, the US and NATO have seen our general purpose forces as a heavy trip wire to release the nuclear deterrent or as means of dealing with very limited contingencies outside of Europe.

The Soviets see their long-range nuclear offensive forces as a deterrent, as we have. But to a much greater extent, they have also regarded these forces as long-range artillery support for backing up the other two primary missions of their forces: strategic defense of the homeland, through counterforce attacks on US nuclear forces and their command and control; and dominance of the Eurasian periphery, through attacks on nearby enemy forces and their bases.

In their thinking about nuclear weapons and nuclear war, the Soviets have never made the distinction between deterrence and warfighting capabilities that ~~have~~ has been characteristic of US thinking. Nor have they discarded the notion of victory in nuclear war despite the assertion of Soviet leaders that nuclear war should not ~~be~~ occur (which they do believe) and cannot be won (which they do not believe).

Even when, in the 1950s and early 1960s, they had too little nuclear force to implement their view, the Soviets developed and held to the notion that real deterrent power had to be real warfighting power as well. This is because they believed that they had not only to deter attacks on them, but as far as they could to encourage acceptance of their aims around the world short of a major war. This required nuclear warfighting strength. Moreover, they believed that nuclear war could actually occur, and, if it did, it would have to be fought for rational political and military aims, despite the awesome destructiveness of nuclear weapons. This is why they have developed a comprehensive array of counterforce nuclear weapons, such as the SS-18 against our silos and SS-20s against Eurasian military targets, and homeland defenses, including civil defense.

Soviet political and military leaders appreciate full well that any large nuclear war would be horribly destructive for their country and potentially lethal for their system. This has not, however, nullified their belief in the possibility of victory in nuclear war. For one thing, the ideology on which

their system rests prevents that belief from being discarded. For them to really believe that the handiwork of humans, such as nuclear weapons, could write the end to Soviet and even human history would mean that Marx and Lenin were wrong in a fundamental respect. More important, however, the Soviets have never believed that nuclear war, even a very large scale war, was likely to take the form of a mindless exchange of massive attacks on cities. Rather they have tended to believe that a major nuclear war would involve attacks of varying intensity and timing on a wide range of military targets, after which one side or the other would quit or collapse, but societies as such could survive, especially if they provided for active and civil defense.

Over the years they have built up offensive and defensive capabilities for this kind of nuclear war. Moreover, as their capabilities have grown, their concept of a major war between the superpowers has evolved as has their concept of victory. This evolution continues, and we are trying to track it in their military exercises and literature. What appears to be happening is a growing Soviet belief that their powerful nuclear forces along with their general purpose forces can enforce a different kind of victory, by deterring US use of nuclear weapons at least on a large scale, while general purpose forces, supported if necessary by the required nuclear strikes, can conquer Europe and perhaps other regions nearby. The US would have to accept the result rather than be destroyed in a massive exchange. But the US would be reduced to a secondary power, while the USSR would emerge preeminent.

The key to this kind of thinking lies in the combination of all Soviet forces strategic nuclear, general purpose, and homeland defense. The Soviets do not separate them into distinct categories quite the way we do. In combination, they could allow victory in a large scale, general, but still not absolutely allout nuclear conflict. The Soviets do not see this outcome as certain, by any means; but it is a possibility that the design of their forces and strategies can make more probable if it ever comes to a war.

In the meantime, the Soviets believe that this overall force combination, along with increasing ability to project power at a distance, e.g., into the Third World, enhances the image of the USSR as a superpower and enhances their "persuasiveness" (i.e., ability to intimidate) vis-a-vis neighboring countries. Power projection into the Third World, which includes military deliveries, insurgency and counterinsurgency operations, as well as military bases and forces, has become a fourth pillar of the Soviet strategic architecture, along with strategic defense, Eurasian dominance, and long-range nuclear strike.

From another perspective one can say that Soviet strategy has been designed over the past forty years to defeat American strategy in war and also in peacetime power politics. Historically, the US has relied on long-range nuclear sanctions plus relatively weaker forward forces to protect its exposed allies near the USSR. The USSR has built forces to dominate over the regions where US allies are located while also negating the credibility of US

long-range nuclear guarantees. Desiring to avoid any war or major test of strength, the Soviets have hoped that this combination would gradually demoralize the US and its allies in peacetime, leading to the erosion of our security commitments, the collapse of our alliances and the replacement of the US by the USSR as the predominant world power.

In the late 1970s, the Soviets developed a detectable confidence that trends in the "correlation of forces", by which they mean political as well as military forces, was moving in a direction favorable to this prognosis. In the 1980s, however, the US and its allies have been more determined to resist this trend, undermining Soviet confidence that this is the way things will go. On the contrary, they now see factors that could -- not necessarily will -- turn these trends around.

From a strictly military point of view, the most worrisome new factors, other than the increase of US defense efforts and renewed commitment to global security, lie in the combination of SDI and the new non-nuclear technologies for conventional defense the US is pursuing. All sources of information indictate how concerned the Soviets are about SDI. Interestingly, Soviet marshals write even more eloquently about their concern over the new conventional defense technologies. Together they challenge the primacy of the twin darlings of Soviet military power: the long-range ballistic missile and the tank. If the US and NATO actually develop and deploy such capabilities, they will undermine the offensive pillars of the Soviet strategic

architecture. The USSR may be no less secure in the strictly military sense, as a result, but it will be less capable of casting an intimidating shadow over its neighbors. This is why Soviet propaganda, diplomacy, and arms control policy are trying to stop SDI and other US defense programs, and, more generally, to encourage the US to return to the behavior and strategic doctrines we exhibited in the 1970s, which the Soviets found quite comfortable. Because Soviet superpower status rests so heavily on offensive military power combinations, the loss of this edge, so the Kremlin fears, will negate Soviet superpower status and ultimately undermine the legitimacy of Kremlin rule itself.

In the end, the challenge of the USSR to Western security and values stems more from the nature of its system than from the content of its strategies and military thought. If the rulers of the Soviet Union could somehow be brought to relent in their determination to control everybody they can reach, at home and ~~aboard~~ abroad, their marshals and generals -- who are intelligent and rational men -- could readily come up with military strategies and force postures which would allow the USSR to be a secure and constructive participant in the world community. For that to happen, however, they have to be shown that the strategies they have followed patiently for thirty years will not work.